

Representative,

I am writing to you to ask you to support bill #336 regarding new regulation for the use of dogs to blood trail wounded game which comes before the committee tomorrow afternoon. I had the privilege to testify before the Senate fish and game committee as asked to do so by Senator Balyeat who is the sponsor of the bill. I regret that I will not be able testify before the House committee tomorrow due to work obligations as an employee with the Department of Homeland Security. The following is a written copy of my testimony before the senate committee. I thank you for your time in this matter and hope that you will support this bill.

As a brief description of my hunting resume: I have hunted for thirteen years and have taken numerous big game animals with bow, rifle, shotgun, and muzzleloader. I have hunted in a variety of states and feel privileged to be able to live and hunt in Montana. I have never guided for an outfitter, but I have guided friends and family to harvest animals, also taken with bow, muzzleloader, and rifle. I have seen dozens upon dozens of recoveries on animals over the years as well as some that were never recovered due to lack of sufficient sign and despite all our best efforts these animals went to waste.

Unfortunately that is a scenario that will inevitably happen to every hunter if they hunt long enough, even to the most accomplished individuals. No matter how much practice and preparation a person puts in, branches, wind, animals taking a step at the time of the shot, and the angle the animal is standing, all play a part in causing an animal to become wounded and sometimes impossible for the hunter to find. There are also many instances some that I have even experienced myself where the shot on the animal was perfect, but do to the way that the projectile entered at the time of impact, there was barely any visible sign to follow, and hardly enough to find the downed animal. A great deal of these situations could have had a happy ending with the use of a leashed tracking dog to aid with the recovery.

In Montana, hunting is a favored tradition as well as a way for some to make a living. As stewards of conservation it is our responsibility and duty to ensure that as little game as possible is wasted. Many of these situations are played out by the hunter wounding the animal, searching for it and when it is not found, continuing to hunt and eventually killing another animal. In this case two animals are killed and one is gone completely to waste. In all actuality someone does get to enjoy the wounded animal. The coyotes, crows, raccoons, and wolves. In this part of the country there are many times when an animal is wounded, and left for a few hours until it expires, and by the time the hunter finds the deer or elk, all he has is the leftovers from the coyotes or the wolves. The point I make, is that dogs do recover wounded game, just not the right ones. Would it not be a better solution to allow leashed dogs that are trained, to follow the trail and find the animal before it goes to waste?

Based on my experience as well as research I have conducted, I know that there are many situations of this nature that could be avoided if the use of leashed blood trailing dogs were allowed in the state of Montana. After seeing the advantage and avoidance of wasted game, close to twenty other states in recent years have changed their laws to allow for the provision of leashed trailing dogs to aid in the recovery of game. I am by no means saying that Montana needs to be "like other states", but that this activity is being utilized throughout the country with excellent results, and to my knowledge very little problems.

Author John Jeanenney has written an extensive book called "Blood Trailing Dogs for Wounded Deer" which deals with every aspect of using a dog to blood trail wounded game. Mr. Jeanenney is a retired history professor who has used dogs to blood trail over 800 wounded deer, and was the first to introduce legislation in the U.S. for the use of leashed dogs to recover wounded game. He has been doing this activity for over 30 years and in his book he shows some of the history behind the use of dogs to blood trail, including its origination in Europe where it has been practiced for literally hundreds of years. Through his influence there have been chapters set up in some states, where there are dedicated dog handlers who are on an on-call basis to help hunters retrieve deer that they have not been able to locate themselves. (Incidentally having talked to Mr. Jeanenney personally as well as he addresses in this his book, he believes based on his experience, that using a 30-50 foot leash is optimum even if not required, for many reasons, one of which is that the handler can better help the dog and gives the two of them a better connection. The concern of the dog getting tangled is almost never a problem as the leash will snake its way through the undergrowth, which is also why a longer leash is better.) The point that I am trying to make is that the use of dogs to locate wounded game is not an obscure and isolated activity, but an activity that has been put to practical application by many individuals who have been able to introduce similar legislation in their own states, some of which are not as prone to hunting as Montana is.

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At this point I would like to say that dogs are used for many purposes in our society. They are used for serious affairs such as in law enforcement to detect drugs, bombs, and narcotics, as well as search and rescue dogs to locate stranded victims in the wilderness or possibly an avalanche. As hunters we commonly use dogs to locate and retrieve geese, ducks, and upland birds such as pheasants, quail, or grouse. Even in these types of hunting, without the aid of the dog, finding a downed bird in the dense undergrowth or prairie grass is sometimes next to impossible. Would it not also be reasonable to allow LEASHED dogs to search and locate wounded big game, especially in this state where the conservation of big game is of utmost concern.

I would like to briefly address some concerns that may arise from this legislation. Some may be worried that tracking dogs may run the deer or harass general wildlife. My first response to this is not a coyote or wolf much more of a harassment than one tracking dog? Also with this legislation the dog would be on a leash so it would be difficult for it to have the opportunity to run off and cause problems, as well as a trained dog knows to ignore all other scents and distractions and stay focused on the trail of the wounded animal. I also find it ironic that the concern of bird dogs running amuck and spooking game is never a concern, even though they are not on a leash as would be the case with a trailing dog.

Some may say that deer and dogs don't mix, but in this situation the dogs are brought in after an animal has been wounded to search and recover the game, and as I previously stated, if the dog has been trained well it knows to stay on point and be focused on the task. Another factor is that an outfitter or guide has much to lose if the game is spooked out of the area, but many outfitters and guides throughout the U.S. employ the use of a trailing dog to recover wounded game, and thereby prevent the waste of an animal.

Also of concern to some, is that some think that the having the dog as a back up may encourage hunters to take long or unethical shots. From what I have seen the folks who take the time to buy a good dog, thoroughly train it, and put in all the time and effort that goes with it, are usually the type of individuals who are ethical and responsible therefore the very reason for getting the dog to begin with. As previously stated, some states where blood trailing dogs have taken root, such as New York, there are organizations that have chapters with dedicated dog handlers that are on an on-call basis, and find many deer for other hunters every year that would otherwise never have been found. It is my opinion that if this legislation causes only 10 percent more animals per year to be found, then it is well worth it. Another factor of the equation is that in some cases the hunter is never sure if the animal just sustained a superficial, non-lethal hit, or died somewhere off in woods. (again an experience I myself have had the displeasure of going through) With the use of a tracking dog, one can usually verify the lethality of the hit and thereby determine if the animal is still alive or if it will be found. At the very least the hunters mind can be put to rest as to the outcome one way or the other.

Some have expressed the concern that people may use dogs, if tracking at night, as an opportunity to poach. I believe that individuals that are prone to violate the law by illegally poaching, don't need to use blood trailing dogs as an opportunity to do so. I would also like to point out that it is already legal to track an animal at night anyway, so if an individual is inclined to poach, the availability to do so at night is already there, as well as it would be much more difficult to have a dog in tow while doing so.

The last issue is that some within Fish and Wildlife have stated that it is already legal to use dogs to track here in Montana. First, if that is the case, then why is there a problem establishing a provision that makes the law distinct? Secondly, I have personally called fish and wildlife and talked with a game warden who informed me that it was not legal to use a dog to blood trail wounded game. So there is obviously not uniformity of opinion on this issue within their organization. Being a law enforcement officer myself, I firmly believe that when the law is black and white, it benefits both the law enforcement officer as well as the citizenry as there will be no grey area and it will not be left up to interpretation by either party.

When all is said and done, the main thing in approving this bill, is that more animals will be recovered, and less will go to waste. With conservation in mind I put forth my ideas to you all and hope that I have presented my case in manner that shows the value of approving this bill."

THANKYOU,  
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